WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A method for control of an operator-controlled system by a user, comprising the steps of:

providing a graphical user interface in a first mode of operation, wherein a first control element is shown;

receiving an invocation by the user representative of a request for the functionality of the first control element;

determining the current status condition of the control element;

in response to an invocation of the functionality of a control element when the current status of the control element is a respective first status condition among a predetermined plurality of status conditions, changing the graphical user interface to a second mode of operation, wherein context-sensitive help information is provided in the graphical user interface;

providing a prompt to a second control element, the second control element being operable to enable the user to select an automated procedure so as to change the current status of the control element to a second status in the predetermined set of status conditions;

in response to receiving invocation of the automated procedure, performing the automated procedure so as to cause the status of the control element to be changed to a second status condition; and

in response to completion of the automated procedure, changing the graphical user interface to a third mode of operation, wherein the requested functionality of the first control element is made available to the user.

2. The method of **claim 1**, wherein the first status condition is an inactive control element condition and the second status is an active control element condition.

3. The method of **claim 2**, further comprising the steps of graphically representing the current status condition of the control element in the graphical user interface.

4. The method of **claim 3**, further comprising the step of providing a change in the appearance of the control element corresponding to the change from the first status condition to the second status condition.

5. The method of **claim 1**, further comprising the step of altering the appearance of at least a portion of the control element to reflect the status currently set for the control element relative to the available functionality of the control element.

6. The method of **claim 5**, wherein the appearance of at least a portion of the control element is grayed-out during a status condition for the control element of inactive functionality.

7. The method of **claim 1**, wherein the context-sensitive help indicates a basis for the first status condition of the control element.

8. The method of **claim 1**, further comprising the step of providing a third control element operable by the user for rejecting the prompt and for causing the graphical user interface to return to the first mode of operation.

9. The method of **claim 1**, wherein the invocation of the functionality of the control element is performed by operation of a cursor-based input system.

10. The method of **claim 1**, wherein the invocation of the functionality of the control element is performed by operation of a touchscreen input system.